Elizabeth Hale, "Entry on: Ender's Game by Orson Scott Card", peer-reviewed by Miriam Riverlea and Daniel A. Nkemleke. Our Mythical Childhood Survey (Warsaw: University of Warsaw, 2018). Link: http://omc.obta.al.uw.edu.pl/myth-survey/item/46. Entry version as of November 05, 2026.

Orson Scott Card

## Ender's Game

*United States (1985)*

TAGS: Alexander the Great Ancient Warfare Caesar Cicero Demosthenes Hero(es) Patriotism Rhetoric / Oratory Roman Empire






*We are still trying to obtain permission for posting the original cover.*

| General information | |
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| *Title of the work* | Ender's Game |
| *Country of the First Edition* | United States of America |
| *Country/countries of popularity* | Worldwide |
| *Original Language* | English |
| *First Edition Date* | 1985 |
| *First Edition Details* | Orson Scott Card, *Ender's Game*. New York: Tor Books, 1985, 324 pp. |
| *ISBN* | 0312932081 |
| *Awards* | 1985 – Nebula Award – Best Novel;<br>1985 – Hugo Award – Best Novel;<br>2008 – Margaret A. Edwards Award, honouring an author and works by that author for lifetime contribution to young adult literature. |
| *Genre* | Fiction, Novels, Science fiction, War fiction |
| *Target Audience* | Crossover |
| *Author of the Entry* | Elizabeth Hale, University of New England, ehale@une.edu.au |
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## Creators



**Orson Scott Card , b. 1951**
**(Author)**

Orson Scott Card is a writer of science fiction and fantasy, popular both with young adults and adults. He was born in Washington State, USA, and grew up in California, Arizona and Utah. He is a member of the Church of the Latter-Day Saints, and served as a missionary in Brazil. He graduated from Brigham Young University, and the University of Utah. His best-known work, *Ender's Game* (1985), was also his first work, written first as a short story, then developed into a novel. He has a prolific output of speculative fiction, both science fiction and fantasy, and a preoccupying interest with heroism, war, education, and issues of free choice and religion. Politically, he is conservative. His views on a number of social issues have excited controversy (especially) his views on gay marriage, and concerns about the violence in his novels). He lives in Greensboro, North Carolina.

Bio prepared by Elizabeth Hale, University of New England, ehale@une.edu.au



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## Additional information

**Adaptations**

*Ender's Game* was adapted into a film of the same name (2012), directed by Gavin Hood, and produced by Summit Entertainment.

A series of comics: series 1: *Ender's Game: Battle School* (written by Christopher Yost); series 2: *Ender's Shadow: Battle School* (written by Mike Carey), were published by Marvel Comics in 2008.

A full-cast audio drama, written by Card, *Ender's Game Alive: The Full Cast Audioplay* (2013, publisher: Audible Studios), retells *Ender's Game*.

**Translation**

Ender's Game has been translated into 34 languages, see Wikipedia entry (accessed: June 3, 2018).

**Summary**

Six-year old boy genius Ender (Andrew) Wiggin is selected for training at the Battle School. An elite force of soldiers is needed to protect humanity from invasion by an alien force, named the 'Buggers,' for their resemblance to insects. Ender's intelligence includes an awareness of his light and dark sides, symbolised externally by his empathic sister, Valentine, and his sociopathic brother, Peter (both of whom have been rejected by the School). As he undergoes his training, Ender develops skills in strategy, fighting, and social manipulation. Throughout the novel, his development is observed by a number of teachers, including the psychologist, Anderson, and the Colonel, Graff, who muse about the ethics of the training they are putting Ender and the other children through. Does the end (destroying the buggers) justify the means (indoctrinating children, turning them into killers (albeit state-sanctioned)? Their discussions frequently centre on the idea that they are training a future Alexander or Caesar, and references to famous classical figures are scattered throughout the story.

As Ender trains in the school, he also plays a game on his "desk," a version of a computer tablet. In this game, couched in the symbolism of fairytales, fantasy, and folklore, a mouse hero violently outwits a giant. Meanwhile, back on earth, Ender's siblings, who fear what he



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will become, and how he will be viewed when he succeeds in destroying the buggers, set about manipulating public opinion through developing online personae: Valentine as "Demosthenes"; Peter as "Locke," (both philosophers who advocated forms of freedom and free speech). As Ender grows in skill and leadership, he is moved to the planet Eros, where he carries out final training under the guidance of Mazer Rackham, hero of the former war. It emerges that his final training is not, as Ender had thought, a simulation, but a real battle. Ender has led his team to destroy the entire civilisation of the Buggers.

As Ender undergoes his training, he and his teachers reflect on the sacrifices needed to become a hero. Ender's empathy enables him to understand his enemy well enough to kill it; but paradoxically, of course, that understanding leads to great sorrow as well. *Ender's Game* concludes with Ender, recovering from depression at the destruction he has wrought on the Buggers, and on some of his fellow trainees, joining a colony program on one of the Buggers' worlds, where he discovers the dormant egg of a Bugger Queen. Communicating telepathically with the queen, he learns that the buggers had not understood that humans were sentient (lacking a collective consciousness), and realised their mistake too late. Ender takes the egg to a new planet, to help the buggers colonize, and writes on their behalf.

## Analysis

*Ender's Game* is a dystopian science fiction novel for crossover audiences, which uses classical references as part of a reflection on aspects of warcraft, political structures, and the notion of the hero. *Ender's Game* blends the basic premise of a school story with the location in a science-fiction military academy, the narrative structure of the hero's journey, and the context of the high stakes of an intergalactic war. Its strong violence, its use of the idea of the genius child, and its reflectiveness on the nature and ethics of warfare, the issues of training soldiers, and the ethics of media manipulation, propaganda, and the shaping of political structures make it a compelling read. Throughout the novel, allusions are made to classical antiquity: ancient Greek and Roman thinkers (e.g. Demosthenes, Cicero), soldiers and leaders (e.g. Caesar), and political structures (e.g. the Hegemon). Like many science fiction writers, Card uses classical antiquity as a set of touchstones, which foreground the



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| | philosophical and political points he wishes to make. Often, as in our world, planets are given classical names (e.g. the planet Eros), to symbolic effect. While there is no distinctive heroic allusion, Ender enacts the truth elucidated by Virgil's Aeneas: "sunt lacrimae rerum" (*Aeneid* II: 462); "there are tears of things," including the sacrifices and loneliness of the epic hero. The tight frame of the novel, focusing on the development of the gifted child/hero, the focalisation on Ender as a kind of "chosen one," and its strong interiority, emphasize the loneliness of the hero's journey. |
| Classical, Mythological, Traditional Motifs, Characters, and Concepts | Alexander the Great Ancient Warfare Caesar Cicero Demosthenes Hero(es) Patriotism Rhetoric / Oratory Roman Empire |
| Other Motifs, Figures, and Concepts Relevant for Children and Youth Culture | Character traits Child, children Coming of age Conflict Heroism Knowledge Learning School Science Siblings Utopia and dystopia |
| Further Reading | Day, Sarah, "Liars and Cheats: Crossing the Lines of Childhood, Adulthood, and Morality in *Ender's Game*", *English Studies in Canada* 38.3 (2012): 207–225.<br><br>Doyle, Christine and Susan Stewart, "Ender's Game and Ender's Shadow: Orson Scott Card's Postmodern School Stories", *The Lion and the Unicorn*; 28.2 (2004): 186–202.<br><br>Doyle, Christine, "Orson Scott Card's Ender and Bean: The Exceptional Child as Hero", *Children's Literature in Education* 25.4 (2004): 301–318.<br><br>Campbell, James, "Kill the Bugger: Ender's Game and the Question of Heteronormativity", *Science-Fiction Studies* 36 (2009): 490–507. |



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